

SOUTH BRUNSWICK SOCCER

Coach’s effort, enthusiasm prompt players to follow

By **Bret McCormick**
Sports Editor

Intent on avoiding a repeat of last season’s drama-plagued fiasco, South Brunswick boys soccer coach Joe Salzler pounded the pavement this offseason. No he wasn’t looking for a new gig, scared off by the gloomy shroud cloaking South soccer. Instead, the second-year coach was looking for players.

“I stayed on the kids. I literally would show up to their work and go recruit. I would stay on them. If a kid said he was going to show up and didn’t, I went to their work, to their house,” said Salzler. “I did everything I can.”

And the effort naturally paid off. Over 40 players turned out for practice in the first two weeks, a very encouraging sign for a South sport that struggled with repeated coaching changes and poisoned team chemistry the last few seasons. And even as Salzler is still improving his own soccer knowledge, the stability and enthusiasm he and second-year assistant coach Ahmed Zanda have instilled seems to have steadied the program’s palpitations.

“I stick to my rules. I know in the past due to coaching changes that there hasn’t been a whole lot of discipline, there hasn’t been a whole lot of school pride,” said Salzler. “I’m trying to instill that in them by doing workdays and fundraising.”

A motivated senior class, seemingly tired of the tumult and lack of success, has augmented Salzler’s efforts with their own hard work. Defender Andrew Bates, goalie Brian Attack, midfielder Nick Stiller and forward Kennon Young have led their peers in workouts throughout the summer.

“We had some kids get together doing their own practice-type thing,” said Salzler. “From about March on they were going two days a week. The seniors were leading them. Since the second week in June we’ve been out there five days a week, sometimes for three and four hour practices.”

There is talent returning on the pitch to go with the extra hours that have been logged. South’s defense should be considerably sturdier than last year, fearless goalie Attack and strong leader Bates holding down the back. Tyler Goldstein also returns from a one-year hiatus with the marching band, a positive result of Salzler’s endless prodding. Freshman Michael Hitt also figures to get plenty of action in the backline.

South did graduate top goalscorers Tyler Evans and Robert Jones, but their departure is offset by Young’s return. His sweet left foot will likely be

involved in most set pieces and he’s respected and listened to by younger teammates.

Dominic Cunliffe joins Young up top, having moved to the area from London, though Salzler’s recruiting efforts had nothing to do with that new face. Cunliffe plays with an understanding of the game uncommon in these parts. He should make an immediate impact on a team that has traditionally been anything but cultured when it came to style of play, and along with Young, should give South enough firepower to challenge for the Waccamaw crown.

In midfield there are familiar faces as well. Stiller brings 100

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South Brunswick soccer coach Joe Salzler needed more players this year

percent effort to the field and is usually in top shape, an imperative at his position. Justin Ramirez also returns and is handy on the wing where he can serve enticing crosses. Willie McRae will likely play in the middle of the park as the team’s resident ankle-snapper, a role he grew into last season. McRae’s soccer experience is limited, but his athleticism and tenacity are right in line with Salzler’s style of play.

McRae’s job is to win the ball and hopefully quickly get it to a teammate in the midfield. Salzler and his assistant Zanda have been consistently imploring their team to keep the ball on the ground, to let the ball do the work instead of repeatedly dribbling into blind alleys.

“Last year we had a bunch of individuals and this year we have a team. We’ve been doing



Photo by Jim Harper

South Brunswick head boys soccer coach Joe Salzler has been relentlessly pounding a quick passing game into his players. Technique has been emphasized this summer as Salzler and assistant coach Ahmed Zanda hope to stamp out the Cougars’ typical “hit and hope” approach to playing. The Cougars have good skill players back and hope to be able to better utilize their natural abilities as well as return to their usual spot at the top of the Waccamaw Conference heap.

nothing but passing. I’m not letting them scrimmage, we’re not shooting on goal; it’s 100 percent passing. We’re doing three to four hours a day until they get sick of it, until they’re doing it in their sleep.”

The early returns are positive. South squared off with Charlotte schools Providence Day and Country Day at Hoggard last week in a scrimmage. The Cougars beat Providence Day, drew with Country Day and took a 1-0 lead on Hoggard before succumbing to John Teller’s habitually strong side 3-1.

While Salzler and Zanda may have a long way to go if they want to make South a mirror of Hoggard, they certainly have succeeded in getting the players to try and keep the ball. More importantly, thanks to a little offseason recruiting and a lot of enthusiasm and effort, they have steadied what was a quickly sinking vessel.

No-huddle hopefully befuddles Scorpion opponents this season

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Returning

Fortunately for North, much of their offensive line is back. Seniors Ivory Myers and Tylan Kelly lead a big, experienced line that will help open holes for returning backs KyEric Myers and Jirese Thomas (pictured at right), both of whom saw decent action last year and should be ready to offset some of Graham’s departed production.

Quarterback Chris Hamilton saw plenty of action last year and has a nice arm to go with decent mobility. The onus is on him to keep North’s offense on track in the organized chaos that is the no-huddle offense.

Hamilton’s got some weapons, too. Wideout Tyler Burton is a sure-handed downfield threat, while Jermon Bryant is one of the aforementioned gazelles that will also be relied on in the defensive secondary. Jamelle Batts’ Lilliputian size would be an issue were tacklers able to catch him. Batts will make plays as a scat back and slot receiver, especially on reverses and sweeps.

North also have solid bookends on the defensive front. Ivory Myers is a consistent two-way player, while defensive end Keilin Rayner is beginning to elicit plenty of recruiting attention as a junior. His 6-foot-3, 225-pound frame is the major carrot so far, and it’s up to Rayner to prove that he’s more than just a chiseled physique.

Coach said it

On the shift to the spread no-huddle offense

“We were just looking for a little change. We had the skill positions and the line back to run something a little different that we thought would be successful, something that the kids would like and embrace. So far they have.”

On the effects of practicing the no-huddle

“It gives us a little more reps in practice. We don’t waste time in the huddle, we’re running plays, running plays. It conditions us more in practice.

Effectiveness of running the spread

“We think it’s going to make guys run base defenses against us. You can’t do a whole lot of different things against it, plus we’re hurrying it up so you can’t sub a lot.”



North Brunswick running back Jirese Thomas



Photo by Jim Harper

Brian Attack offsets his shorter stature with a fearlessness that’s requisite for good goalkeeping. He and fellow senior Andrew Bates form the core of what should be a solid backline for South Brunswick’s boys soccer team. They’ll be key for the Cougars to challenge West Brunswick and Whiteville for the league title.

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